

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN INDIA:

A REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is to find out the current scenario of menstrual hygiene management in our country and what role is media playing in putting it on the forefront. Also to find out the possible government schemes related to menstrual health and their implementation and effect. The methodology adopted is qualitative in nature along with content analysis and focus group survey. According to a landscape analysis report published in May 2016 and sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, there are more than 355 million menstruating girls and women in India. The same report states that more than 75 % of the girls were not aware about periods when they first had it. Not only in the rural areas but in the urban areas also Menstrual Hygiene Management is neglected majorly. The researchers found out that menstrual hygiene management has made an impact. Not only women are more aware than ever but also male population is better informed than before. But this is restricted to a certain %age of the urban areas and educated population only. This research aims to have a social implication through making the women more aware of the menstrual hygiene management and understanding how media aids in propagating the necessary information.

KEYWORDS: Menstrual Hygiene Management, Periods, Taboo, Society, Government & Media

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INTRODUCTION

Maintaining menstrual hygiene is of utmost importance for the young menstruating girls and women. To show how important menstrual hygiene is to the society, May 28 is celebrated as the World Menstrual Hygiene Management day. 28% of the students in India do not go to school during their period, due to lack of facilities and materials (Unicef). For the absorption of menstrual blood, 89 % use cloth, 2% cotton wool, 7 % sanitary pads and 2 % ash (WaterAid). 75% of the girls use cotton cloths during their period (Unicef MHM).

According to a report published on TimeNow.com on 23rd Jan 2018, more than 80% of women in Bihar still depend on cloths to manage their periods. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) IV, nearly 62 % of young girls between 15 and 24 years of age still use cloths. Only 16% of the girls use sanitary napkins (Unicef MHM). 60% of girls in India only change their menstrual cloths once a day (UKAID). High costs and unavailability of sanitary pads is the prime reason for women and girls in India not to use sanitary pads (WaterAid). Educating the girls about menstrual hygiene management would help them increase their grades at school, wages at work and overall self-esteem. Having access to the sanitary products would keep them at par or at least on the same track as their male counterparts. Girls who attend school regularly turn out to be a wise and informed adult and contribute extensively to the family, Community, Economy and Nation. The more informed a girl would be, the

more would be easier for her to debunk the age old traditions and myths, embrace the changes positively and pass it on to the next generations. The traditions that are still prevalent in our society include banishing the girls outside the house for five days to spend in isolation, not permitted to participate in the puja or to enter the temples or to touch the pickles or to enter the kitchen. These regressive traditions often cause harm to the girls and women subject to these traditions.

The reports of rape or death by snakebite or excessive bleeding are not unheard of. The correct information is needed to be disseminated to not only the girls and the women but also the young boys and men. Information related to menstrual hygiene management not only focuses girls but also boys in order to fill the knowledge gap, clear misconceptions and make an environment more conducive of the free movement of girls. Since our society is a patriarchal society, it's forbidden to talk about 'women problems' with the male members of the family, which include fathers, brothers and husbands primarily. The knowledge pertaining to the menstrual health will not only desensitize the male population but also create an environment more conducive of the open discussions and empathy. Since male members are the one who usually provide for the family, it becomes imperative that they are aware of the situation of girls during period so that they can arrange or provide resources for the arrangement of the sanitary products for the girls of the family – daughter, sister, wife or even mother.

Having proper knowledge about menstrual hygiene management helps the girls and women stay clean and healthy during the period. This is termed as WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene). It helps the girls and the women save themselves from unnecessary infections, skin irritation, rashes and many a times cervical cancer. A data from the World Health Organization states that there is more than 30 % deaths related to cervical cancer in India. This rate is almost double the global average and poor menstrual hygiene management is partly to be blamed. The social implication of this research is that it aims to assess the condition of menstrual hygiene management and suggest changes to improve it.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative in nature:

- **Survey Research** – The researchers met personally a sample size of 100 urban women and 50 urban men.
- **Procedure Adopted** - Two sets of questionnaires were prepared with 15 and 6 questions each.
- **Secondary Research** – Books, research papers and exhaustive internet research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to **Joshi and Fawcett (2001)** in a paper presented in the 27th Water, Engineering and Development Centre conference, change in the situation of women can take place once they start participating and being represented in decision making forums. They need to be aware of the health and hygiene management so that they can take care of their own health and hygiene.

According to **Patkar and Bhardwaj (2004)**, in a paper titled Menstrual Hygiene and Management in Developing Countries: Taking Stock, found out that very few professionals have been actively involved in the menstrual hygiene management programs. Absenteeism and drop-out rate have been correlated to menstruation; still fewer measures have been taken to resolve the issue. Efforts to maximize the use of low-cost napkins and other resources of maintaining periods have been minimal.

According to **Ahmad and Yesmin (2008)**, in a paper titled Menstrual hygiene: Breaking the silence, in Bangladesh 90% teenaged girls use rags during their periods and 95% of them reuse the rags. The cause of this was found to be unawareness and lack of menstrual hygiene management facilities. The paper also pointed at the reasons such as high cost of napkins, no separate toilets for girls and the shame that girls feel in sharing their health problems that negatively impact their reproductive health.

According to **Dhingra et al. (2009)**, in a paper titled Knowledge and Practices Related to Menstruation among Tribal (Gujjar) Adolescent Girls, there is a lack of awareness among the adolescent girls of the gujjar tribe. Various other studies conducted by Bhattacharyya (1991), Singh et al. (1992), Shukla et al. (1994) and Vaidya et al. (1998) also found that the average age of menarche in rural, urban and tribal areas were 13 – 14 years.

According to **Mahone and Fernandes (2010)**, in a paper titled Menstrual hygiene in South Asia: a neglected issue for WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programs, pointed out that lack of awareness about the menstrual problems and proper solutions prevents the topics of menstrual hygiene management becoming a priority.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT- INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

“Menstruation does not stop just because there is an emergency. Besides the practical issues of obtaining, washing and disposing of sanitary towels, women may have cultural issues to deal with. In some societies, women have to go somewhere private whilst they are menstruating. If the whole household is living in a single room or tent, this can be very difficult.”

Paul Sherlock, Ex-Consultant, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM)

As per the Census 2011, about 89 % of the population of our country lives in accommodations without proper toilets. This makes the taking care of their menstrual health with safety and dignity a daunting task for young girls and women as well. Girls have to mostly dropout of school once they reach puberty and the rate is one out of five, which is quite high for a developing super power like India. According to a report by AC Nielsen and Plan India in 2010, only 12 % out of the 355 million reproductive age young girls and women in India had access to sanitary products and other resources of menstrual and personal hygiene. Women in rural and semi urban areas use old rags, ash, wood shaving, wool and other unhygienic resources to manage their period which often results in various infections that at times prove to be fatal also.

A research conducted by Patkar and Bhardwaj (2004) reflects how far we are as a society from reaching the desired goal in menstrual hygiene management. Sowmyaa Bharadwaj and Archana Patkar's (2004) research paper stated the current scenario, practices, barriers and actions related to this issue. Total 85 water and sanitation workers worldwide were consulted. The research found out that:

- Very few professionals were actively involved in disseminating the required knowledge and doing the needful.
- The literature regarding the menstrual hygiene management is silent on the adequate supply of water for sanitation and bathing and also on the availability of sanitary products.
- The major reason of dropout among young girls in schools is the non-availability of clean toilets and most of the times, no toilets. Still this issue is not given importance and the aspect of menstrual management in the construction and design of toilets is ignored altogether.

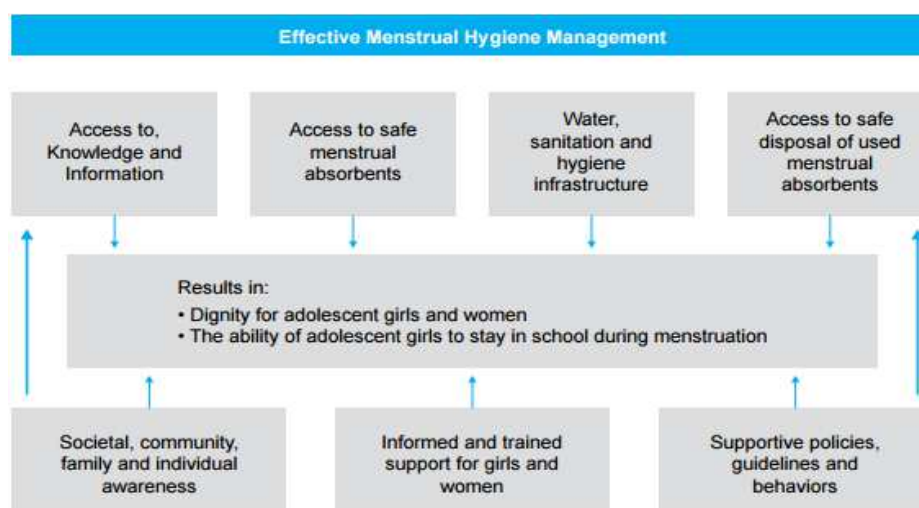
- Menstrual hygiene information has started to be disseminated among young girls and women recently but not as vigorously as it should have been. Also, there are no efforts to include adolescent boys as well as men into the information circuit. Men also need to be sensitized towards this issue.
- There is minimal effort in the production and distribution of low cost sanitary napkins and the poorest of poor are yet to avail the benefits of these products.
- The information related to the washing of used clothes and disposal of the sanitary napkins and clothes is not disseminated.

The same report states that while the menstrual hygiene management has slowly started to make inroads in the discussion and policy making, the disposal of the used sanitary products is still an issue. The disposal of the human waste which includes menstrual blood is done out in the open most often which poses a threat to the environment. An average middle class girl or women used around 15000 sanitary pads in her lifetime (Bhardwaj and Patkar, 2004). More than 12 billion sanitary pads are disposed annually filling the already overburdened landfills. Also, the sanitary pads are flushed down the toilets making them clogged. For these situations an effective disposal system needs to be implemented so that not only the use but also the disposal of the sanitary products becomes safe and dignified.

Bhardwaj and Patkar also took into consideration the various zones of India and considered one city from each zone and the work done in them related to menstrual hygiene management. In Rajasthan, an NGO Vikalp specializes in disseminating information related to the reproductive health to the rural population. It organizes workshops to explain the rural women how to use a washable pad. For this, a life size doll is used and the way of using the sanitary pads is demonstrated. This method has been fairly successful in the rural areas. Also, the cost of the sanitary products acted as a hindrance in the access. So, the rural development department of the state government initiated a project to motivate the young girls to use sanitary products. The department made sure to make the products available to them at a low rate as compared to the products in the market. In association with the UNICEF, more than 350 Self-help Groups were trained in the task of napkin production. The sanitary products were now available to the girls at the cost as low as Rs 20 per packet. There are 1.5 lakh Self Help Groups and all of them have been roped in to make sanitary products so that they are readily available to the girls. The low cost incinerators for safe disposal of pads have been designed by the UNICEF and cost not more than Rs 1500 and work with the help of firewoods. The rural development department conducted workshops to disseminate the information on the low-cost incinerator technology for more than 15 Self Help Groups. These incinerators have been installed in more than 300 toilet complexes and more than 30 girls' toilets in schools so far in the state. In Uttar Pradesh, an NGO named Sayahoginitiated a workshop to educate women on what can they do to manage their period. It also succeeded in making them understand the use of sanitary pads during the period. In Maharashtra, the vermi-composting of the sanitary products is done in some hospitals.

EFFORTS FROM THE MANAGEMENT

The Indian government in December 2015 has also laid the guidelines specifically for the menstrual Hygiene Management under its Swachh Bharat Mission Guidelines (SBM-G). These guidelines have been regulated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation in order to help the 355 million menstruating girls and women. These guidelines outline the role of the participants at the State, District and School levels. The government has also come up with a framework as to how the process of menstrual hygiene management should be put forward.



(Source- http://www.mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/Menstrual%20Hygiene%20Management%20-%20Guidelines_0.pdf)

The guidelines that are enumerated are as follows:

- Funds available under the Information Education and Communication (IEC) component may be used for IEC in this matter and to raise awareness and skills on Menstrual Hygiene Management in all places and specifically amongst adolescent girls in schools. IEC plans should include this component for raising awareness among all stakeholders. They should also include this component for raising awareness among all stakeholders.
- Issues relating to women's personal hygiene namely menstrual hygiene are to be focused under the SBM (G). Girls and women have hygiene and sanitation needs linked to their menstrual cycle. Women suffer in the absence of knowledge about safe practices on MHM.
- There are several examples where Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Self Help Groups (SHG) have worked with the community, informed them about menstrual hygiene practices and also developed economic models to meet the demand for sanitary napkins. This is one area where CSOs and SHGs can play a key role.
- In addition to making sure that every household has a toilet, governments and all stakeholders must make sure that,
- Every adolescent girl and woman, and their families, including men and adolescent boys, must have awareness, knowledge and information so that menstruation is understood and can be managed safely with confidence and dignity.
- Every adolescent girl and woman must have easy access to sufficient, affordable and hygienic menstrual absorbents during menstruation.
- Every adolescent school girl must have access to a separate toilet with private space for cleaning, washing. This includes access to adequate and sustained water supply and soap.
- Every adolescent girl must have access to infrastructure for disposal of used menstrual absorbant, and should know how to use it.

(Source- http://www.mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/Menstrual%20Hygiene%20Management%20-%20Guidelines_0.pdf)

JOURNEY OF MHM IN INDIA

The journey of menstrual hygiene management in India has been quite an eventful one as ours is a strictly patriarchal society where period is still a taboo and talking openly about it remains a distant dream. Still the situation that is different today from what used to be 30 years ago. During the 1980s, there was an intense silence around the topic of menstruation. Women would not speak up unless and until they had major problems. Men of the family used to neglect any talk related to menstruation as they had conditioned themselves. The access to healthcare facilities was limited as hospitals were far away from the rural areas. From simple infections to serious ailments, local healers were contacted and the women suffering would be deemed 'possessed'. Many rituals would be performed as remedies to ward off the 'spirits'. In such situation, the ailment would either subside with time or worsen. In the hilly areas, ash was used whereas in desert areas like Rajasthan, sand was filled in a cloth and used as an absorbent. In rural areas, there was a rampant belief that if the male members of the family look at the menstruation cloth, they will go blind. As a result of which, the cloth used for managing period was usually hid in the dark corners, without being sterilized in sunlight, causing more harm to the user. Sanitary products were available only in the chemist shops and could be used only by the women who could afford them. Absence of private space or washrooms made the women change their soiled clothes only during dusk and dawn, risking them to endless infections and health problems. Also, illiteracy and lack of information and awareness made most of the women oblivious of the sanitary products, their access and use. Even though the government of India in 1992 started programs related to family planning and in 1997, the reproductive and child health program, the menstrual health aspect was not completely addressed. As far as non-government organizations are concerned, Child In Need Institute founded on 1974 and Chetna, founded in 1984 were some of the organizations that did commendable work in addressing the menstrual health of women.

In 2000s, Goonj, a non-government organization started a campaign called 'Not Just Another Piece of Cloth' and started distributing clean cloth to the rural women to manage the menstruation. Also, Thought shop Foundation in Kolkata and Vikalp design in Udaipur were the NGOs that tirelessly worked in the field of reproductive health. On the international front, Water Aid and UNICEF continued to gather the situation of the menstruating women the world over and providing them with the information and products that they needed to manage the period with dignity. From 2005 onwards, the work in the reproductive health area scaled up and many programs were implemented. The government implemented the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and the task of making the rural women aware of the menstrual hygiene management and overall reproductive health was included in the responsibilities of the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers.

Arunachalam Muruganthan, a now household name, thanks to Akshay Kumar who essayed his role in the recent famous movie 'Padman', designed and patented the low cost sanitary pad making machine. These machines were used by many Self Help Groups, thereby giving a major push to the production and distribution of low cost sanitary pads. Also, the media played a major role in disseminating the information regarding menstrual health mainly through advertisements. In 2008 in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, Kathy Walkling started a cloth pad movement under her non for profit organization Eco Femme. The main concern of this movement was to inform women to use the cloth pads instead of regular sanitary pads so that the environment is also taken care of along with the menstrual health of the women. Another NGO at Udaipur called the Jatan Sansthan, has started the Sukrashit Mahwari Abhiyan and spreads awareness through training programs and workshops. In 2012, the government of India, in collaborations with Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council

(WSSCC) started a sanitation program called Nirmal Bharat Yatra which included menstrual hygiene management also as an agenda. Also there a continual thrust towards using the reusable cloth for menstruation rather than the disposable sanitary products. In 2014, a facebook page called Sustainable Menstruation in India (SMI) was launched to promote reusable cloth instead of the regular disposable pads. Initially there were a handful of members but today they amount to more than 12,000. The governments of Bihar and Jharkhand have set up teams called Uger to provide training for the making and distribution of reusable napkins.

ROLE OF MEDIA -COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Media plays a pivotal role in community mobilization. It is a very potent tool in reaching out to heterogeneous masses. Community mobilization at any level needs requires target audience participation and media can prove very useful in mobilizing the masses. Mass media are the channels of communication through which ideas, information, messages etc. are exchanged with the target audience at large. Media are "devices for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication" (Defluer and Dennis, 1981). Mass media has also been viewed as a device for mass communication (Blake and Haroldsen, 1995). The involvement of media in domains like health sector, especially menstrual hygiene management falls within the purview of development communication. Development Communication means the dissemination of information to the target audience with intent to persuade them to adopt positive changes in their lifestyle and viewpoint altogether. It is also defined as "the use of all forms of communication in reporting, publicizing and promotion of development at all levels of society" (Edeani, 1993). Communication of any kind involves media which has the basic task of entertainment, education and information. According to Harold Lasswell, media is also accountable for the surveillance of environment, correlation of parts of society, transmission of culture from one generation to the other and entertainment. Media has the power to reach out to the masses at large and mobilize. This is the core reason why governments, businesses and non-government organizations seek the help of media when they have to disseminate information regarding any new policy, product or scheme. Mass media create awareness related to any issue in the community. Also, it puts forth development made by other communities so that a particular community doesn't lag behind in general development. This idea falls in line with one of the tenets of development media theory propounded by Dennis McQuail (1987) which states that media in developing countries should align their interests with news and information in other developing countries that are close geographically, culturally and politically. This is one of the reasons why this paper tries to analyze the situation of menstrual hygiene management in the neighboring countries of South East Asia.

Media is omnipresent today, from metropolitans to the rural areas. One or the other forms of media has made inroads in every nook and corner of the country. Media channels like television, radio, newspaper, internet etc have penetrated into the very fabric of our society. The advent of media in our country was for educational purposes, graduating to entertainment and then to edutainment which is a combination of education and entertainment. Meaning the media not only provides us with entertainment but also helps the government, policy makers and business organization in disseminating information to the people at large. Not only do media take up the task of disseminating information to the target audience but also it collects the valuable feedback and incorporates it in the future messages. The government formulates policies and the media help in making people understand what a certain policy is all about and how the public would be benefitted from it. This process makes the implementation of the policies easier. People get a better understanding of what the policy or the law has in store for them, making them better receptive towards the policies and

laws in question.

But menstrual hygiene management is a topic where the media is yet to do its best. However, the advertisements of sanitary pads have been in picture since long, it's only recently that the pad manufacturing companies have started stressing on maintaining the menstrual hygiene. Also, it's only recently that the advertisements related to menstrual and personal hygiene have started to appear on the media with prominence. When it comes to Bollywood, our film industry has hitherto refrained from making movies on period until 'Padman'. This movie starring Akshay Kumar has to a certain extent broken the barriers that were surrounding menstrual hygiene management. The movie is based on the novel 'The Legend of Laxmi Prasad' written by actor of former years Twinkle Khanna. This novel is inspired by the real life story of Arunachalam Murugantham who after discovering her wife collecting filthy rags and newspapers to use during her period, decided to make low cost sanitary pads. He invented low-cost sanitary pad-making machine because the branded pads are costly and one of the major hindrances in the access. Murugantham is also credited for innovating basic mechanisms to make young girls and women of the rural areas aware of the risks of traditional unhygienic practices around menstruation.

Social media has become the prominent space for the discussions and debates on this topic. There is a new wave of online creators who are placing uncensored women's stories at the forefront such as Girliyapa. Though these platforms are small in numbers but they are filling the gap between the media and the society and also the way cinema and television have projected women hitherto. Social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc. have provided an impetus to the open conversations which is in contrast with the existing patriarchal mind set to a degree of unprecedented level. As opposed to the time few years back when there was no space, both physically and virtually to talk openly on menstruation, today there are thousands of online communities that enable women to put across their viewpoints openly and with dignity. Also, the various body positive campaigns have helped normalizing the period in our patriarchal society. #Periodtalk, #Livetweetyourperiod, #AMAMU, #JustATampon, #HappytoBleed(feminisminindia.com) are just a few examples of the trending themes that enable women to challenge the age old stigmas and taboos openly.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

The government has rolled out guidelines for menstrual hygiene management under the Swachh Bharat Mission Guidelines (SBM-G). These guidelines aim at promoting the concept of menstrual hygiene management among the young girls and women. India has more than 135 million menstruating girls and women yet the situation related to the dignified management of the period has been a matter of grave concern. According to a recent survey, out of 14,724 government schools only 53 % had a separate and usable girl's toilet (National Sample Survey Office/Census (2012) Annual Status of Education Report (Rural), 2013). The guidelines have been issued by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation in order to help and support the young girls and women. These guidelines tell what needs to be done by the local as well as the state governments. Also, the role of district administrators, school management, teachers and technical staffs has been outlined clearly. The government has involved various ministries to carry on the tasks related to menstrual hygiene management.

- Ministry of Women and Child Development looks after the training of the anganwadi supervisors and workers; production of sanitary pads on the village level by the self-help groups; supply of sanitary pads in the shelter homes and counseling of young menstruating girls on menstrual and personal hygiene management.

- Ministry of Human Resource Development looks after the training of the nodal teachers to provide information to the girls and boys on puberty related issues; makes available the absorbents or sanitary pads on the school level; reaching out to the fathers or other males of the family to sensitize them towards menstrual hygiene so that they can aid the daughters and other female members of the family and promotes water, sanitation and hygiene related facilities.
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation looks after the menstrual hygiene management activities; availability of disposal mechanisms and providing of funding for training if Information Education and Communication (IEC).
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is responsible for the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram and adolescent reproductive sexual health; counseling of young boys and girls on puberty; educating young boys and girls under the Rashtriya BalSwasthya Karyakram; weekly distribution of iron and folic acid tablets to girls who are no longer in school under the Integrated Child Development Services; distribution of sanitary pads and training of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA).
- The Tribal Development Department looks after the training of teachers in the ashram schools and madrassas; distribution of sanitary pads; disposal of used sanitary products and water, sanitation and hygiene related facilities in the tribal areas.
- The Rural Development Department is responsible for the availability of sanitary pads under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission; awareness for the menstrual hygiene management among women and mothers to be and promotion of water, sanitation and hygiene under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

The Government is also implementing the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG), also known as the 'Sabla' scheme. This scheme is centrally sponsored in more than 200 districts selected from the all the states and union territories. It aims at the empowerment of the young adolescent girls in the age group 11-18 years. Under this scheme, health care, nutrition and general life related education is imparted. The Sabla scheme has two components – nutrition and non-nutrition. Under the nutrition component, the girls in the age group 11-18 years are provided with supplementary nutrition comprising 600 calories and proteins. Under the non-nutrition component, the girls in the age group 11-18 years are given free health checkups, counseling on health education and supplementation. Also, a vocational training is given to the girls in the age bracket 16-18 years. Under the Sabla scheme, a total amount of 61021.36 lakhs has been allotted to the governments of state and union territories in the year 2015-16 and Rs 58498.58 lakhs was utilized (Press Information Bureau). In the year 2016- till date, a total amount of Rs 27486.79 lakhs has been allotted under the Sabla scheme and the utilization Rs 7844.49 lakhs (Press Information Bureau). The beneficiaries under this scheme amounted to more than 10 million during 2014-15 and more than 4 million in 2015-16 till date. Since this scheme doesn't cover the country in entirety, the requests and proposals from the governments of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala have been made to the central government to allot funds under the Sabla scheme to these states also (*This information was given by the Minister of Women and Child Development, Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha).

In Bihar, the Sabla scheme is run under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in 12 districts including Vaishali, Saharsa, Patna, Gaya, Aurangabad, Buxar, Banka, Sitamarhi, West Champaran, Kishanganj, Katihar

and Munger. The project aims at helping the drop out girls also and providing them with formal and non-formal education. Under the Sabla scheme, a Kishori Card is given to every beneficiary wherein their name, age, body-mass index, referrals and services received under the schemes will be mentioned. A group of 15-20 girls is formed which is named as Kishori Samooch and one 'Sakhi' from among them is selected who act as a peer monitor. 'Sakhi' provides motivation and guidance to the other girls of the group.

In Delhi the Adolescent Health- Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram program is being run by the government which aims at raising awareness regarding the menstrual hygiene management, increased availability of sanitary products and safe, dignified and environment friendly disposal of the used sanitary products (Delhi Government portal).

SURVEY FINDINGS

For this paper, a review of the topic of menstrual hygiene management has been done. This has been done through a survey of the focus group, the findings of which are as follows:

- 86 % of the women think menstruation is still a taboo in the society, while 10 % think it's not and the remaining 4 % feel its partially considered a taboo.
- 90 % of the women said they were caught off guard when they were not prepared for the period and 10 % stated they never faced such situation.
- 85 % of the women use pads during menstruation while 6 % use tampons and the remaining 9 % use cloth to manage period.
- 40 % of the women got to know about the period from their mothers, 25 % from their sisters, 25 % from their friends and the remaining 10 % from their teachers.
- 80 % of the women, which means the majority of them, are aware of the term menstrual hygiene management. Only 5 % wasn't and the remaining 15 % was partially aware.
- Upon being asked if they practice it, 100 % women responded positive.
- 85 % of the women disposed the used sanitary pads wrapped in a paper in the dustbin, 5 % flushed it, 10% used other methods to dispose of the used pads. However, the use of incinerators was not mentioned even in single case.
- 70 % of the women said they use cotton if pads are not available, 15% said they use cloth which is readily available, 10 % use tissue papers and 5 % use other methods to manage the period in case pads are not available.
- 90 % of the women said they have received help as well as information regarding menstruation from different sources whereas 10 % stated they received no help or information.
- 55 % of the women think the government is not as proactive as it should be while 20 % think the government is doing its share of job and the remaining 25 % think the government is partially doing what needs to be done in case of menstrual hygiene management.
- 76 % women think the media has helped in spreading awareness for menstrual hygiene management whereas 19 % of women think the media is not of much use and the remaining 5 % is unsure of the role of the media.

- 100 % of the women believe that the topic of menstrual hygiene management should be covered extensively in the media.
- The % age of male population having the idea of what menstrual hygiene management surprisingly high -88%. Only 12 % had no idea about it.
- For 15 % of the males it was just a ladies problem whereas 85 % males think it is a social issue.
- 82 % of male respondents had female members in the family in the age bracket 13-50 years, whereas 18 % males did not have any female in the said age bracket.
- 75 % of the male respondents said the females in their family were aware of the menstrual hygiene management whereas 20 % said the females in their family weren't aware of MHM and the remaining 5 % weren't sure.
- 80 % of the male respondents assist the females of the family in managing their period where as 9 % don't and the remaining 11 % said it's not applicable for them as they live alone.
- 35 % of the male respondents feel satisfied with the current situation of MHM in our society, whereas 60% of them find the situation unsatisfactory and the remaining 5 % weren't sure.

On the basis of the survey conducted and content analysis, it was found that there is still a need to put menstrual hygiene management on the forefront through mainstream media. Even the educated stratum of the society isn't still as vocal as it ought to be. Male population however isn't as ignorant as it used to be as the male respondents were fairly aware about the menstrual hygiene and some even helped the female family members during periods in whichever way the help was sought.

Suggestions

- Sample size maybe increased so that there is more clarity.
- Inclusion of the rural population, especially women.
- Psycho-education made compulsory on the primary level.
- Low cost pad outlets maybe increased in number.
- Comparison study may be conducted to see the issue in wider population.
- The topic may be included on school syllabus.
- Angan Badisevikas may be given advanced training in spreading awareness.

CONCLUSIONS

Period or menstruation is still a taboo in our society as it's a patriarchal society. Women can't even talk about their problems let alone discussing it freely. In a society where menstrual hygiene management is unheard of by more than 80 % of the 355 million menstruation young girls and women, the idea of every girl and woman to have access to MHM resources is a distant dream. However, the situation has started to change slowly but steadily. The governments both state and central have started schemes to make available the menstrual hygiene management resources. They also have set up the machinery to disseminate the information and education as to how to manage the period with dignity. The aid of

self-help groups are taken for the production and distribution of low cost sanitary pads as the cost has always been one of the major deterrents in using the sanitary pads. The heads of the family or the breadwinners do not give much thinking to such situations, considering them to be 'ladies problem'. But in urban areas the male members of the family are sensitized towards the menstrual needs of the females of the family. They think it's a social issue and contribute and assist the female members of the family as much as they can.

Media also seem to have been doing their job by advertising the sanitary products during the prime time and lead actresses endorsing other personal hygiene products. The mainstream media including the newspaper, radio and television started to show the ads related to menstrual hygiene management years back. With the advent of social media it became a lot easier to voice the opinions of the women on issues such as period. Bollywood joined in late but with a band with the movie Padman, starring Akshay Kumar and Radhika Apte. This movie shed light on the plight of women who are still wrapped in a time warp and either don't have access to MHM products or lack the willingness to change. This movie tells the story of Arunachalm Murugantham who invented low cost sanitary pads and low budget machines to manufacture them. Today his low cost pad making machines are used by the self-help groups in the production and distribution of low cost sanitary pads. In totality, the situation is still grim when it comes to menstrual hygiene management in India but things have started to look up with the support of media and central and state governments.

Social Implications

This paper brings to notice the current situation of menstrual hygiene management in our country and what role do media play in informing and educating public at large. Through the combination of methods like survey and content analysis, the researchers were able to reach to a conclusion that the situation of menstrual hygiene management has improved over the period of time and media have an important role to play in it. This paper also reached a conclusion that since media have an important role to play in informing and educating, it should be more extensively used. Also, this paper tells about the available government schemes related to MHM and how the topic of menstruation has reached a level where it can be talked about openly even in the rural areas.

Limitations

The focus group for the survey has been divided into married and unmarried females and married and unmarried males, the response rate is low. Out of 100 females and 50 males contacted, only 35 females and 15 males responded. The female population is mainly urban, rural population could not be contacted.

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